

The surreptitious feminization of domestic violence: An empirical exposé

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Abstract: While most victims of domestic violence are women those prone to acts of domestic violence cannot be universally identified as male. Domestic violence permeates Western societies such as the United States and the United Kingdom which includes male victims who are frequently denied or overlooked. This may be due to differences in reporting of domestic violence between men and women and may mean that the rates of victimization for males and females is much less sex-based than it appears. As a result, to the extent that Social Work and who has access to services is a culturally constructed phenomenon, male victims in need require advocates in all areas whose sole purpose is problem resolution.

Keywords: feminization; domestic violence; victim; perpetrator; culture

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Introduction

While most victims of domestic violence are women those prone to acts of domestic violence cannot be universally identified as male (Stuart et. al., 2006). Conversely males as victims of domestic violence have been minimized. The community appearance, status and demeanor of perpetrators regardless of sex make them appear personable and loving to their partner and family members. Their acts of domestic violence may occur in private concealed from public display. They may act out physical violence against their partner by injuries easily hidden such as scars not normally visible due to clothing or injuries which do not require medical attention. What qualifies such assaults as domestic violence is that they do not occur by accident. Perpetrators do not act solely out of stress, excessive drinking or drug abuse. Domestic violence is in fact committed for purposes of control by one partner of the other. The ensuing level of violence may escalate until the desired control outcome is reached. Failure to reach such an outcome may conclude in homicide, murder or otherwise death (Liem & Roberts, 2009).

Domestic violence permeates Western societies which includes male victims whose needs are frequently denied or overlooked. In particular when the violence pertains to men as victims in the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) this failure to acknowledge becomes apparent (Straus, 2009). Male victims of domestic violence are much less visible, yet the suffering they experience in both nations can have a deep and lasting impact both physically and emotionally (Lininger, 2009). Said impact is associated with a wide range of demographic categories (Zaleski et al, 2010). One reason why male victims of domestic violence do not warrant attention equal to that of women victims is as a result of cultural influences which define men as the 'stronger' sex (Rennison, 2010).

Johnson (1995) investigated domestic violence and determined the existence of two distinct types: patriarchal terrorism and common couple violence. Empirical evidence for each typology was based upon a large sample of data gathered from women's shelters and other public agencies in the US. Results suggested that a significant number of American families suffered from occasional bouts of domestic violence. Said violence involved husbands, wives or both. The more severe patriarchal terrorism was acted out by an equally significant number of other families where women and/or children would be systematically terrorized by males in an effort to maintain absolute patriarchal control of family members (Johnson, 1995) thereby contributing to the male perpetrator as domestic violence standard.

Stark (2004) in assessing domestic violence expressed concerns regarding coercion, power and control often found to be in the possession of an abuser. Starks is also critical of mainstream feminists who support laws which require social service agencies to intervene in domestic violence disputes in ways which harm victims. Such interventions may be construed as an alternate means of state personnel exerting power over women where said personnel may have failed to process the violence in

their own lives. The solutions to these domestic violence problems are not complex and the claim that state interventions can exacerbate the violence is nothing new. Thus a common theme of feminists during the dawn of the shelter movement, was that state systems designed to provide services to domestic violence victims in fact increased their dependence thus reinforcing abuse. Pagelow (1981) coined the term 'secondary battering' to describe the phenomenon (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Reference to this phenomenon was an attempt to close the gender gap institutionalized by systems and service models which perpetuated inequality between the sexes. The ultimate goal was to give voice to women's issues directed at relevant systems that the necessary changes might occur. Furthermore according to Mills (2003) it is the personalized nature of domestic violence that makes the impersonal nature of state interventions punitive. What's more state mandates undermine women's right to choose how police will be involved. Subsequently both men and women are disempowered assuming that individual acts of domestic violence may be addressed using a standardized response. Such a response more often than not stereotypes male and female victims both as helpless and dependent. They are then directed to call the police, get a protection order, separate, and/or press charges against their perpetrator. Those whose circumstances warrant alternative solutions, such as remaining with their abusive perpetrator are stigmatized. This precipitates a rejection of the wholesale criminalization of domestic violence given the tendency of one party (the perpetrator) to blame the other (the victim) when in fact violence may have been committed on the part of both. As a solution Mills (2003) suggests that prosecution and incarceration remain viable alternatives only under life-threatening circumstances.

In an attempt to further standardize domestic violence for agency use Straus (1979) constructed the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS). The intent of such a scale was to make possible a means to legally distinguish between simple and aggravated assault (Straus, 1979). The CTS provides a supplemental 'checklist' which enables those who administer it the ability to identify cases of chronic and severe assaults for which there would be consequences including legal action. The CTS has been successfully tested for validity and reliability (Straus, 1979).

The CTS consists of three scales. These scales include reasoning, verbal aggression, and physical aggression or violence. The violence scale is further subdivided into the 'minor' and 'severe' categories. The minor violence consists of K, L, and M items. The severe violence items, N to S, are assumed to pose a greater risk for physical injury requiring medical attention (Straus, 1993). However despite various efforts to address domestic violence in a holistic frame, men remain its standard for perpetrator and women its standard for victim.

According to 6.01 of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (2008):

Social workers should promote the general welfare of society, from local to global levels, and the development of people, their communities, and their environments. Social

workers should advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs and should promote social, economic, political, and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice (p. 204) .

Pursuing the realization of social justice, Social Work professionals in the US/UK aspire to promote social, economic, political, and cultural values and institutions in the elimination of domestic violence. The elimination of domestic violence will insure the general welfare of society and benefit those who might otherwise suffer as victims. The elimination of domestic violence will also enable living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs. Unfortunately, for male victims of domestic violence social justice by the previously mentioned suggested criteria and in particular Social Work institutions has been unattainable. In actuality domestic violence despite the aspirations of the Social Work profession, has not been banished from society in part or in whole. It has instead been both simultaneously challenged and sustained institutionally, socially, economically and politically via the male perpetrator as standard. A striking cultural similarity between the US/UK as pertains to social justice is not irrelevant to the sex-based disparities indicative of documented domestic violence events. Subsequently, Social Work in both countries has then operated by a tradition which exclusively acknowledges women as victims and men as perpetrators (Loiacono, 2010). Commensurate with such traditions women victimized by domestic violence have necessarily qualified for various social services less available to men which ultimately sustains sex-based disparities and continuous challenges to social justice as an aspiration designated by the NASW Code of Ethics (Mincy, 2006).

Relative to tradition sex-based domestic violence disparities in the US/UK are rooted in feminization. Feminization herein involves the wholesale tendency to rescue women at the expense of equally victimized men. Via feminization the empirical evidence of men victimized by domestic violence has not been sufficiently addressed in the discourses of Social Work or other helping professions (Hines & Douglas, 2010). Efforts on the part of governments and law enforcement agencies less culturally inclined to assist male victims of domestic violence, is embraced by the most politically conservative male members of society at-large (Mayer, 2008). Those who object do so only to the extent of what programs serve what population and how much those programs should cost. Subsequently is the little known feminization of domestic violence which when acted out conforms to Western cultural traditions.

The intent of this paper is to illustrate via empirical evidence contrasts between those in the US/UK perceived as domestic violence victims, that is women, and those perceived as domestic violence perpetrators, that is men. While feminization will be addressed as pertains to domestic violence it is here suggested that feminization in both countries permeates all aspects of the social service system because it is commensurate with the patriarchal traditions of Western civilization (Kimenyi & Mbaku, 1995). By addressing the feminization of domestic violence this paper will

expose the disserving characterizations of an otherwise vulnerable population of men designated perpetrators and as such less entitled (Hall & Pizarro, 2010). The vulnerability of these men provides a policy rationale for the application of a more scientific and/or technological Social Work paradigm such as evidence-based-practice (EBP) to objectively allocate services and resources. The following will facilitate comprehension of the circumstances: (1) an empirical review of domestic violence in the US/UK; (2) an empirical review of database documentation; (3) suggestions for victims of domestic violence; and (4) a conclusion.

An empirical review of domestic violence in the US and UK

According to the American Civil Liberties Union (2005) women sentenced to execution and who reside on death row encounter more hardships than their male counterparts. Data for the study was collected from 66 women, of whom 10 have been executed. Results suggest that due to the limited number of women on death row, those sentenced are more subject to isolation which contributes to or exacerbates mental illness. As women they might also encounter episodes of sexual harassment from prison guards and staff. Males in particular may watch them as they dress, wash, and use the bathroom. According to data collected 1 in 5 of the women investigated had been sexually assaulted while imprisoned. Their sexual abuse and other quality of life circumstances parallels the experiences of women on the outside.

Unfortunately a disturbing number of the women on death row have been sentenced for crimes that do not normally result in the death penalty for men. What's more there are similarities between women's lives before they are sentenced and the type of crimes they are convicted of. Subsequently more than 50% of women incarcerated have endured continuous abuse in the form of domestic violence by either family members or partners. Half of the women involved in the ACLU study had at least one associate during the acting out of their crime who more often than not received a lesser sentence. Lastly, almost 70% of the study's women on death row had been convicted of killing someone they knew intimately (ACLU, 2005).

Coker, et al (2007) investigated the frequency of intimate partner violence by type. Their investigation took place during a large, clinic-based, nurse-administered screening and services intervention project. They administered a brief intimate partner violence screening. Said screening consisted of items designed to measure sexual and physical assaults and psychological battering. A *Women's Experience With Battering* scale was administered to consenting women receiving care at 1 of 8 rural clinics in South Carolina. Eventually between April 2002 and August 2005, 4,945 eligible women were offered intimate partner violence screening. Of that number 3,664 (74.1%) agreed to take part. Results indicated that domestic violence in a current (ongoing) relationship was 13.3%, and 939 women (25.6%)

had experienced domestic violence at some point in the past 5 years. Considering those who had ever experienced domestic violence most (65.6%) experienced both assaults and psychological battering. Another 10.1% experienced assault only, and 24.3% experienced psychological battering only. A majority of women (85.5%) currently experiencing both psychological battering and assaults indicated that domestic violence was a problem. These results attest to the viability of the screening technique for the increasing importance of implementing intimate partner violence screenings in clinical settings. Its use is intended to reduce domestic violence in intimate relationships but in the aftermath such programs reinforce the 'women as victim' standard (Coker et al 2007).

According to Davies, et al (2006) the majority of social scientists who investigate domestic violence consider only female victims of male perpetrators. Few have considered the effects of perpetrator sex on blame attributions toward male victims. The aforementioned scientists investigated such variables. Their participants consisted of 161 undergraduates at a British university enrolled in social science courses. Each had been required to read one scenario where perpetrator sex was varied between subjects, and who completed a questionnaire measuring their blame toward the victim and the perpetrator. Results of the investigation revealed that male participants assigned more blame to the female victim if the males themselves had been assaulted by their girlfriends personally. Additionally male participants regarded the female perpetrator in terms more favorable compared with the male perpetrator.

Strug and Wilmore-Schaeffer (2003) investigated fatherhood in response to the increasing number of single and noncustodial fathers which Social Workers will encounter in the immediate future. They stress the fact that Social Work literature is a significant resource where critical information may be accessed. Such literature provides a patriarchal description of fathers, and especially noncustodial fathers. Said description is intended to address the gaps in information about fatherhood and the relevant policy and practice issues related to fathers. Of note is the fact that fatherhood like male victims of domestic violence having received less attention in the Social Work literature requires more information for the development of policy and programs to assist fathers. The author's conclusion was taken from a review of 118 database articles that appeared in 25 Social Work journals. The fatherhood bias in Social Work journals is commensurate with the feminization of domestic violence where male victims have been minimized.

Some of the most thorough investigations of domestic violence in the US have been conducted by scholars from the academy. The executive of the *Family Research Laboratory* at the University of New Hampshire Murray Straus and a Sociologist at the University of Rhode Island Richard Gelles are amongst the most noted. For more than twenty years they have tracked domestic violence compiling what are believed to be the most accurate data available through the *National Family Violence Survey* (NFVS). The study was funded by the *National Institute of Mental Health* (NIMH). According to what investigators found 84% of American families do not engage in domestic

violence. Of those 16% who are violent most engage in some form of slapping, shoving, and grabbing. Approximately 3-4% of about 1.8 million engage in extreme forms of domestic violence including kicking, punching, or using a weapon. Straus and Gelles further contend that 188,000 women a year are subjected to violence severe enough to warrant medical attention. While that number is extreme it is not in the assumed millions that some have reported (Gelles & Straus, 1988).

Other studies pertaining to domestic violence in the US include that published by O'Leary, et al (1989) which appeared in the *Journal of Clinical Psychology*. It involved 272 couples in a longitudinal study of early marriage. Results indicated that 44% of the women compared to 31% of the men were physically aggressive. After 18 months, 36% of the women and 27% of the men reported being physically aggressive. After 30 months of marriage investigators found no significant differentiations in physical aggression between men and women. However at each interval women were in fact more aggressive than the men they were married to. These various forms of aggression included pushing, shoving, and slapping. By the use of conditional probability analysis and given the likelihood of aggression at 30 months before marriage and at 18 months after marriage scores were .72 for women and .59 for men.

Male victims of domestic violence in the UK by account are no less dramatic than what exists in the US. According to the UK's *Home Office* statistics significant percentages of male victims of domestic violence were subjected to some form of force by their female partner (Campbell, 2010). Their data was an estimated 48.6% in 2006-07, 48.3% the following year and 37.5% in 2008-09.

The longevity of domestic violence in the UK is equally disturbing. In 2008-09 approximately 28% of women compared to 16% of men reported being subjected to domestic violence abuse since they were 16 years of age. Their confessions are commensurate with an estimated 4.5 million female victims and 2.6 million male victims. What's more, 6% of women and 4% of men admitted experiencing domestic violence in the past year. This is in sync with an estimated 1,000,000 women and 600,000 men reported as victims of domestic violence overall. Equally revealing data is that the number of women prosecuted for domestic violence in the UK increased from 1,575 in 2004-05 to 4,266 in 2008-09 (Campbell, 2010).

In the UK reportedly half of all domestic violence victims are men. Such men rarely report these assaults to the police and when they do law enforcement personnel are much less likely to act as they do on complaints from women. (Hamilton & Worthen, 2011). Empirical evidence of such disparities reveals a cultural tradition which puts male victims of domestic violence at risks irrelevant to women. Subsequently domestic violence is then apt to be seen as a female victim/male perpetrator problem, which empirical evidence suggests is untrue (Campbell, 2010). According to the same evidence, male victims of women perpetrators are more often ignored by the police. When complaints about women perpetrators are addressed such women are more often released from police custody in a shorter span of time. What's more in the provision of services men have access to a significantly fewer number of shelters

where they might seek refuge from their assailants. As reported by Campbell (2010) in England and Wales there are 60 refuge locations available to male victims of domestic violence compared to 7,500 available to female victims.

Empirical evidence for male victims of domestic violence in the UK is also available from the *British Crime Survey*. According to this survey men comprised about 40% of domestic violence victims for years 2004-05 and for more recent years 2008-09. What's more during 2006-07 men in the UK comprised 43.4% of victims in the previous year where data increased to 45.5% in 2007-08 and decreased to 37.7% in 2008-09.

According to the UK's *Home Office* statistics more male victims of domestic violence were subjected to some form of force by their female significant other (Campbell, 2010). Their data was an estimated 48.6% in 2006-07, 48.3% the following year and 37.5% in 2008-09.

The aforementioned empirical evidence of domestic violence is an illustration of sex-based disparities. While the proportion of women victimized by men continues to exceed that of men victimized by women, the latter by investigation appears all but non-existent. However due to cultural tradition males victimized by domestic violence prefer not to report whereas women more likely report. (Schwartz et.al., 2010) Subsequently the ratio of victimization between males and females is of much less sex-based disparity than it appears. But in patriarchal societies such as the US/UK dominated by male superiority victimization remains the exclusive domain of women which is commensurate with Social Work database documentation.

An empirical review of database documentation

In 2012 the Economics department at Harvard University awarded Seth Stevens-Davidowitz the degree of doctor of philosophy for his research methodology utilizing database documentation. The methodology utilized in the current study is a replication of Seth-Davidowitz's works which relied upon 'Googled' search terms to quantify racial prejudice against US president Barack Obama. For the current work the author relied upon the Social Work Abstracts database in order to better access a Social Work population. According to Seth-Davidowitz such a method functions remarkably well. Subsequently the author searched the Social Work Abstracts database from the National Association of Social Workers for domestic violence terms made meaningful by the aforementioned empirical investigations. The conditions under which Social Workers provided papers online were considered ideal for capturing what they are really thinking and feeling about domestic violence.

Many Social Workers may find the topic of males as domestic violence victims to be insensitive to women and thus may view it as charged material. Despite the fact the author performed the culturally daunting task of searching the Social Work

Abstracts database for: abused father/mother; battered man/woman; good man/woman; husband/wife abuse; male/female batterer; male/female perpetrator; men's/women's shelter; and victim man/woman. The all-text search reviewed papers published 1966-2011. The following 8 item results are contained in Table 1.

Table 1

Terminology used in Papers Identified from the Social Work Abstracts Database

1. Abused Father	41	Mother	115
2. Battered Man	51	Woman	270
3. Good Man	107	Woman	172
4. Husband Abuse	62	Wife	168
5. Male Batterer	37	Female	18
6. Male Perpetrator	55	Female	46
7. Men's Shelter	32	Women's	135
8. Victim Man	133	Woman	343

Table 2

Percentages of papers referring to issues relating to domestic violence

	%
Abused fathers/mothers	35.6
Battered man/woman	18.8
Good man/woman	62.2
Husband abuse/wife	36.9
Male batterer/female	205.5
Male perpetrator/female	119.5
Men's shelter/women's	23.7
Victim man/woman	38.7

As per the Social Work Abstracts database evidence of a pattern exists as correlated to the aforementioned published investigations. The 35.6% database calculation is compatible with Strug and Wilmore-Shaeffer (2003) in their review of Social Work journals. The 18.8% database calculation is compatible with Campbell (2010) that domestic violence is more often viewed as a male perpetrator female victim problem. The 62.2% database calculation is compatible with Stark's (2004) criticism of state personnel, likely to be men, who want to exert power over women. The 36.9% database calculation is compatible with Campbell that male victims of domestic violence prefer not to report it to the police. The 205.5% database calculation is compatible with Johnson (1995) who contends that those who batter are more often perceived to be men as the standard. The 119.5% database calculation is compatible with Straus (1993) who contends that males remain the perpetrator standard. The 23.7% database calculation is compatible with Campbell (2010) who reports the

existence of 60 shelters in the UK available to men compared with 7,500 available to women. Lastly the 38.7% database calculation is compatible with Stuart, Meehan, More and et.al. (2006) who contend that male victims of domestic violence have been minimized.

The aforementioned sex-based disparities pertaining to domestic violence in the US is also sustained in the UK not only by cultural tradition but the feminization of domestic violence as well. Said feminization is evident in databases because the cultural view of women as victims to the exclusion of men has dominated scholarly Social Work and other social science literature (Monteiro, 2000). This otherwise obvious assumption is not the least subject to challenge as indicated by one of Social Work's most esteemed database resources.

Suggestions for victims of domestic violence

Suggestions for victims of domestic violence must necessarily begin with acknowledgement of the characteristic warning signs and symptoms. No partner involved in an intimate relationship regardless of their sex should submit themselves to living in fear of their significant other whether legally joined or not. When the warning signs or violence becomes apparent victims should not hesitate to terminate the relationship or seek immediate help. According to domesticviolence.org (2010) the following are steps victims can take in an effort to escape the risks of domestic violence:

Safety strategies for those experiencing domestic violence as suggested by domesticviolence.org

1. Having important phone numbers nearby for you and your children. Numbers to have are the police, hotlines, friends and the local shelter.
 2. Friends or neighbors you could tell about the abuse. Ask them to call the police if they hear angry or violent noises. If you have children, teach them how to dial 911 in the US or other police agency in the UK. Make up a code word that you can use when you need help.
 3. How to get out of your home safely. Practice ways to get out.
 4. Safer places in your home where there are exits and no weapons. If you feel abuse is going to happen try to get your abuser to one of these safer places.
 5. Any weapons in the house, think about ways that you could get them out of the house.
 6. Even if you do not plan to leave, think of where you could go. Think of how you might leave. Try doing things that get you out of the house - taking out the trash, walking the pet or going to the store. Put together a bag of things you use everyday. Hide it where it is easy for you to get.
 7. Go over your safety plan often (domesticviolence.org, 2010).
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The aforementioned suggestions are intended for victims of domestic violence regardless of sex and other demographic category.

Conclusion

By definition culture includes lifestyles, customs, art, religion, language, values and behavior associated with a particular group at a particular point in time (Deal & Kennedy, 1983). Culture enables life by empowering the weak to be collectively strong and thus integrating large numbers of people on the basis of a shared commonality. Culture does not require legal sanction in order to be effective but more often than not in advanced technological societies such as the US/UK culture influences the structures of perception.

In actuality culture is a 'catch-all' term which appears to exclude very little quality of life matter (van Wormer, Besthorn & Keefe, 2007). However for comprehending the feminization of domestic violence interested parties must consider the associations of domestic violence with patriarchal tradition. Similar to culture tradition in general includes a set of interrelated phenomena through which reality is created, communicated and by institutions such as Social Work documented. Relevant documented phenomena include methods of service, demographics of personnel, perspectives, standards and ways of relating in a cultural context. When such phenomena operate in conjunction, they come to represent a significant aspect of what is assumed to be the most prudent way to conduct social services which under the current circumstances enables feminization (Monroe & Tiller, 2001).

Moving beyond feminization can be accomplished by the development of a Social Work technology set in policy. By literal definition, traditional schools of thought suggest that technological competence means the capacity of Social Workers to execute a particular task efficiently (Jones & Alcabes, 1989). This simple definition becomes obsolete when applied in the absence of evidence-based-practice (EBP). EBP operates on the basis of scientific support in the conduct of service and procedure. Furthermore, as pertains to domestic violence EBP enables technological competence because the variations in tasks are made more intelligible commensurate with differing treatment methodologies (O'Neal, 1999). The tasks of a macro practitioner will differ from those that are required of a micro practitioner. Whereas decision-making ability, treatment modality, knowledge base, and so forth are important, none of these as a single criterion reign sufficient in addressing the sex-based disparities in reports of domestic violence without the benefits of EBP. However, considered in conjunction and as a policy they can potentially comprise Social Work's professional technology.

Cynicism and burnout stem partly from people loyal foremost to culture and tradition. Such is a common occurrence for those employed in fields including Social Work who are often overworked and underpaid. Women in particular who clearly

understand the urgency of domestic violence but who are professionals not influenced by feminization are most at risk for such burnout. Their struggles more often take place within an environment where agencies do not share a common vision about the problems of society. Via their advocacy for males in need they are subjected to unnecessary stress in attempts to maintain coherence and direction (Senge, 1990). Thus, when Social Work institutions contradict science and cannot reach consensus about the priorities of programs and services neither men nor women victimized by domestic violence can be optimistic about the future.

To ultimately reduce the influences of feminization upon the perception of domestic violence in the US/UK, personnel must be amenable to redefining culture and its appropriate place in practice and the delivery of services. In the face of two powerful barriers—sexism and the status quo—this characterizes the viability of their efforts. Culturally diverse scholars stress the process of self-acknowledgment and the proclamation of existence as the first critical step in personal and later social acceptance of what is different (Hall, 2003). For male victims of domestic violence, this simple proclamation by Social Work would be a revolutionary act in its repudiation of a culturally imposed limitation upon access to programs and services. Male victims of domestic violence are unique in that their defining difference (sex) is an attribute less associated with a victim status. Since males in need can often be identified by their appearance, their access to services may be unnecessarily complicated for sexist reasons. As a result, to the degree that Social Work and who has access to services is a culturally constructed phenomenon, victim males in need require advocates in all areas whose sole purpose is problem resolution.

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